

# Entertainment Weekly

#828 • July 8, 2005

**FANTASTIC  
FOUR**

Its Twisted  
Path to The  
Big Screen

**CHARLIE  
AND THE  
CHOCOLATE  
FACTORY**

## Johnny Depp

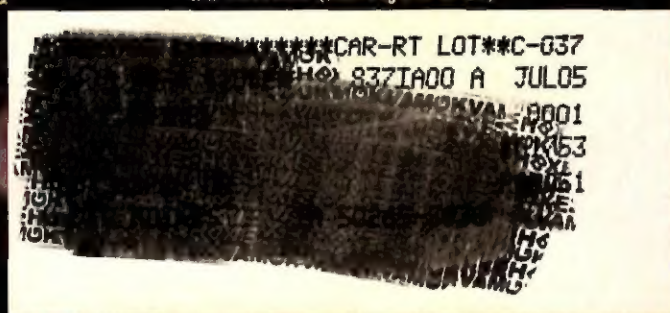
- How He Created His Wackiest Role
- What's New In This Version
- Who's Unhappy About the Remake

[www.ew.com](http://www.ew.com) (AOL Keyword: EW)

**PLUS!**

**Meet This  
Summer's  
Surprise  
Action Hero**

SEE PAGE 28



Depp as Willy Wonka







BY CHRIS NASHAWATY

# THE TRUTH ABOUT charlie

AS THE ECCENTRIC WILLY WONKA,

JOHNNY DEPP IS BRINGING A WHOLE NEW FLAVOR TO

'CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY.'

WILL IT SUIT AUDIENCES' TASTES?

Our story begins...

Once upon a time there was a movie star named Johnny. Johnny liked to dress up in strange outfits and make himself laugh. But sometimes his idea of fun would make the grown-ups uncomfortable. They'd ask him to be more like everyone else. But Johnny wouldn't listen. Then one day, the grown-ups stopped asking him to be like the others and Johnny was suddenly very, very confused. ▶▶▶▶



## Meanwhile, in a curious and far-off land...

**J**OHNNY DEPP IS WEARING FAKE TEETH AND A SAFARI outfit. A pith helmet rests on his head. And in his hand is a very large machete to protect him from the hornswogglers, snozzwangers, and whangdoodles that live deep in the jungles of Loompaland.

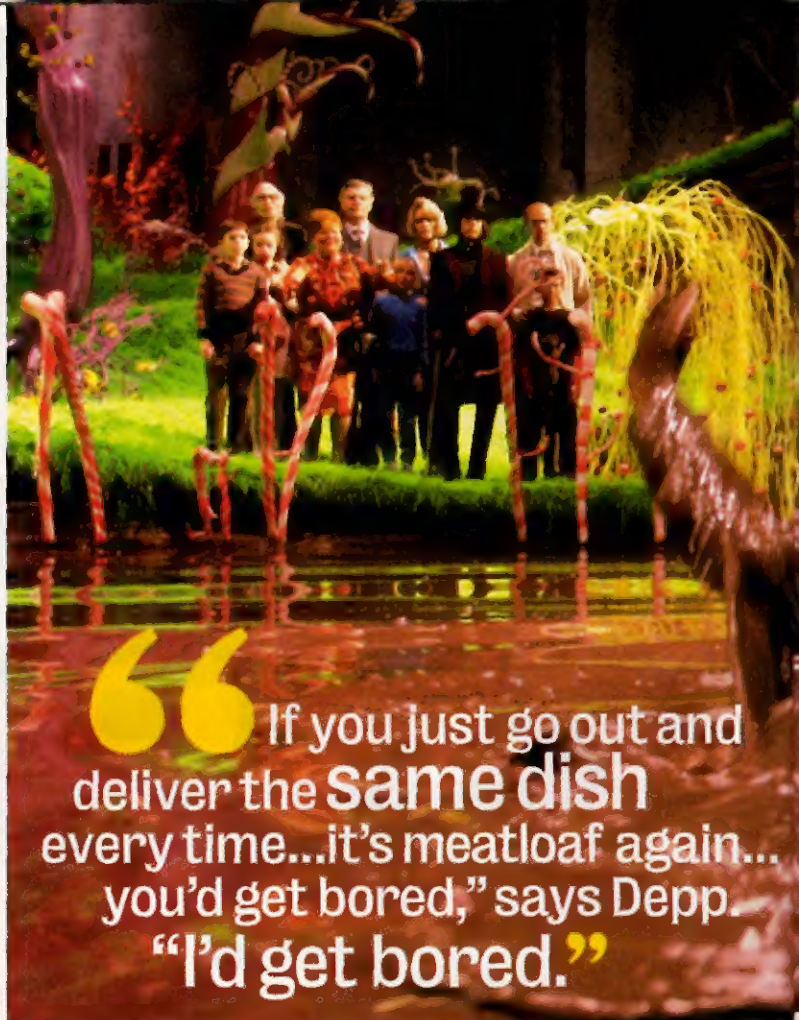
As *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*'s crazed confectioner, Willy Wonka, Depp is bushwhacking his way through the far-off jungle home of the Oompa-Loompas (or, in this case, an enormous soundstage at England's Pinewood Studios) in search of exotic new flavors for his sweets. If this tropical setting doesn't ring any bells, that's because Loompaland wasn't in the original 1971 film that starred Gene Wilder. The new *Charlie*, as everyone involved is quick to point out, is not a remake. And while the basic story—five kids (four brats plus Charlie Bucket) find golden tickets and get a privileged peek inside Wonka's top secret chocolate factory—remains the same, director Tim Burton went back to Roald Dahl's 1964 children's book for his inspiration. "A lot of people are huge fans of the movie and hold it in awe," says Burton, enjoying the shade under one of Loompaland's bamboo trees. "I wasn't one of them."

Today in Loompaland, Depp is being chased through the jungle by a foot-long flying insect. The shot may sound straightforward enough, but take after take gets botched. Then, on take No. 6, Depp accidentally catches his boot on a fallen tree trunk and tumbles ass over teakettle, landing facedown in the mud. Before he can get up and say he's all right, Burton is cracking up. Considering themselves cursed, the director and his star decide to try again after lunch. So Depp, in all of his fey Indiana Jones glory, pops his dentures out of his mouth and hands them to a female crew member, who plops them in a Ziploc bag filled with pinkish liquid. Depp asks her, "That's schnapps, right?"

Depp's bizarre safari outfit is merely an appetizer for how downright freaky he looks as Wonka. For most of the \$150 million film, he wears his hair in a Prince Valiant bob, has a powder white face, sports lavender contact lenses, and carries a see-through cane filled with candy. He's also a germaphobe of Howard Hughesian proportions and speaks in a high-pitched voice that makes him sound like a 16-year-old Valley girl shopping for tank tops at the Galleria. Not surprisingly, Depp wanted to make Wonka even stranger. "What I was really excited about was a long nose," he says during a break in his trailer. "I brought it up with Tim, and he was like, 'Hang on, hang on. A prosthetic nose? Come on!'"

## A cast of characters assembles for the quest...

**W**ITH THEIR ODDBALL RÉSUMÉS, THE COMBINATION of Tim Burton (*Edward Scissorhands*) and Johnny Depp (you name it) seems like a natural one to take on Roald Dahl's famously fractured fairy tale. But the idea of making a new *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* had been kicking around Warner Bros. since the late '90s. First, the studio worked their way through a laundry list of screenwriters who didn't work out. Then they went through a roster of directors who didn't stick until Burton finally signed on and hired John August, the writer of his previous film, *Big Fish*.



**“If you just go out and deliver the same dish every time...it's meatloaf again...you'd get bored,” says Depp. “I'd get bored.”**

Over the years, Wonka candidates had come and gone too (Jim Carrey, Nicolas Cage, Brad Pitt, and Will Smith). Even Marilyn Manson's name came up at one point, although no one's quite sure whether it was just Manson himself who brought up the notion. "I have no idea where that came from," says *Charlie* producer Brad Grey, who has since been hired to run Paramount Pictures. Depp, for one, says he would have happily paid to see Manson as Wonka. "That would have been an interesting way to go," he says. "I think I'd go see it before I brought my kids, though."

August says he first read Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in the third grade. He loved the book so much that when he was 7 or 8, he wrote Dahl a fan letter: "I got this postcard back from England," says August. "I later learned that it was a form letter signed by someone else or a machine." Strange as it may sound, though, August had never seen the Gene Wilder movie. And when he asked Burton if he should go back and watch it, he says, "Tim almost leaped across the table and told me not to."

Burton informed August that he wanted their *Charlie* to come straight from the book. That meant scrapping several well-remembered scenes and introducing others that weren't in the original film. For example, Wonka doesn't sing in the new film (something Depp admits he's relieved about); the Oompa-Loompas are all played by one actor named Deep Roy, whose 4-foot-4-inch height is digitally shrunk to 30 inches (see sidebar); spoiled brat Veruca Salt is done in by nut-shelling squirrels instead of by a golden goose; and we get a glimpse of Wonka's tense childhood relationship with his domineering dentist father (played by Christopher Lee). According to Burton, that last one, which actually isn't in Dahl's book, was essential. "You want a little bit of the





(Clockwise from left) Augustus Gloop has a delicious fall; Wonka takes Charlie and his grandpa for a spin in the great glass elevator; at home, Charlie shares his birthday present



flavor of why Wonka is the way he is," says Burton, "Otherwise, what is he? He's just a weird guy."

### A new hero comes forth...

**E**VERYWHERE YOU TURN AT PINEWOOD, you step into a different Dahl fantasy come to life. In one hangar, Germanic glutton Augustus Gloop is falling into a river of chocolate. In another, Wonka's Everlasting Gobstopper machine spits hard candies into a cooling pool, where an Oompa-Loompa swims to fetch them like a pearl diver. And outside, on the studio's backlot, stands the run-down home of Charlie Bucket and his family (Mom, Dad, and Grandpa Joe are played by Helena Bonham Carter, *Shine's* Noah Taylor, and *Waking Ned Devine's* David Kelly, respectively). The tiny shack leans at a vertigo-inducing slant, its twisting chimney and patchy roof covered with fake snow. Cabbages grow like weeds in the front yard. It's here that Charlie daydreams about the nearby Wonka Factory, gazing at the chimneys through a hole in the eaves.

Charlie is played by Freddie Highmore, Depp's sad-eyed 13-year-old costar from *Finding Neverland*. Highmore comes from North London and he speaks in the kind of adorably polite whisper that makes you want to lean in to hear him even if you didn't have to. Highmore says that the only film of Burton's he's seen is *Planet of the Apes* and that he found out he got the part during a family vacation, just as he was watching the sunset at the Grand Canyon. When asked what he liked most about making the film, he says, "I quite like the room with the 50-foot chocolate waterfall. And I liked my character, Charlie. On the outside it doesn't look like he's



got much. He's poor, he eats cabbage soup. But he's kind and he has a family who loves him. So, actually, he's really got a lot."

### And then an unexpected twist, as a nemesis appears...

**W**HETHER OR NOT 1971's *WILLY WONKA* IS A GREAT film, or even a good film, is almost beside the point. Neither commercially nor critically successful at the time of its release, Wilder's film only later snowballed into a sort of camp classic. Now, three decades later, it's become a sugarcoated time capsule for a generation known for its nostalgic sweet tooth. On the set of *Charlie*, virtually everyone is careful to respectfully sing the praises of Wilder and his film, but that didn't stop Wilder from bad-mouthing the new *Charlie*, telling London's *Daily Telegraph* recently: "It's all about money. It's just some people sitting around thinking 'How can we make some more money?' Why else would you remake



Willy Wonka?" Wilder declined to comment for this article.

Depp says he was taken aback when he heard Wilder's remarks. "Hearing about that was disappointing," he says. "But I can understand where he's coming from, I guess. The one thing I didn't understand was that apparently he was quoted as saying 'Well, they just did this for money.' Well, hey, man, where have you been? When didn't they ever do anything for money? Nobody's ever made a film in the history of cinema where they weren't expecting some return on their dough."

### In the darkest hour, when all seems hopeless...

**T**IM BURTON USED TO BE IN LOVE WITH THE MOVIES. Now they just feel like torture. As a gawky kid with a serious set of braces growing up in Burbank, Burton says he would fork over 50 cents to spend his afternoons in the anonymous darkness of a movie theater. One theater near his house would program triple features like *Destroy All Monsters*, *Dr. Jekyll and Sister Hyde*, and *Scream, Blacula, Scream*. "I'll always remember this image of being in line to see

*When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*, and all the younger kids were like, 'Dinosaurs are so cool!' and all the older kids were like, 'Oh, man, I hear there's this really hot babe in this movie!'"

Lately, though, Burton would rather do just about anything than look at more celluloid. It's less than a month before *Charlie* is set to hit theaters, and he's not only putting the final touches on the film but also editing a second movie, the stop-motion animated feature *Corpse Bride*—a cousin to 1993's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Sitting in his editing office in London, Burton is slouched on a sofa, totally wiped. His hair is a tangled wasp's nest of black tendrils, and stubble covers his face. "I'm numb," he says. "Drive a nail through my hand and see if I respond."

Burton has no idea why he agreed to turn in two films two months apart, but he's been regretting it ever since. "I'm a deer in the headlights right now, with a moving car approaching." The stress of delivering a summer movie in an era when release dates are often set by studios before a script is finished is one of the many things Burton finds troubling about Hollywood. "It's like you're a runner and they beat the s— out of you and break your legs right before you're supposed to race," he says. "And then they say, 'Now go win the race.'"

While Burton says the pressure wasn't as bad on *Charlie* as it was on, say, *Planet of the Apes* (a big-budget remake that landed with a critical thud), he does admit that Warner Bros. had some suggestions that he felt were pretty lame. "They thought the Charlie character should be more proactive and that Wonka should be more of a father figure," he says, almost wincing. "And I'm sitting there thinking 'Willy Wonka is not a father figure! If that's your idea of a father figure, yikes. Willy Wonka's a weirdo.'"

There was one moment, however, that Burton loved dealing with the studio. In the past, whether it was *Edward Scissorhands*, *Ed Wood*, or *Sleepy Hollow*, Burton always had to dig in and battle to cast Depp. "This was the first time that, before I could even get the words out, they were like, 'What about Johnny?' The irony was wild." Jeff Robinov, Warner Bros.' president of production, admits that Depp's recent uptick at the box office helped ease the studio's mind about casting him. "Obviously *Pirates of the Caribbean* was a very successful movie, so that doesn't hurt."

Now, with just days to go before a finished print of his film has to be sent to the studio, all Burton can see is the walls of his editing facility closing in like some fun-house room out of Wonka's factory. Even when he picks up the morning newspaper, it seems to be mocking him. "One paper here in London said that by us making this movie, we were wiping out the childhoods of millions of people and strangling it," he says with a loud sigh. "I



He's donned an Ewok suit, played a young gorilla girl, and been hurled through a window by

Hugh Jackman. Nothing, however, prepared the 4' 4" actor Deep Roy for his motley role as 165—yup, 165!—of *Charlie*'s cocoa-obsessed Oompa-Loompas. Born in Nairobi, Kenya, to Indian parents, Roy was an accounting student in London before dropping out at age 18; six years later he took a bit part in 1976's *The Pink Panther Strikes Again*. Now a 30-year Hollywood veteran and three-time Burton alum (*Planet of the Apes*, *Big Fish*), Roy will next voice Napoléon Bonaparte in the director's stop-motion creepfest *Corpse Bride*. —Michelle Kung

## I, OOMPA-LOOMPA

ber like that. Tim would say to me, "You're the hardest-working man in showbiz." **Tell me about the dance sequences.** I'm not a professional dancer, but I can move! Tim told me that the Oompas were strictly programmed, like robots—all they do is work, work, work. So when it comes time to dance, they're like a regiment; they do the same steps. Except for the Mike Taavee dance, where the Oompas play in a rock band. I learned to play the guitar for that one.



**Are you partial to any of the musical numbers?** My favorite is Augustus Gloop's song because it's very Bollywood. I kept telling Tim "We've got to do a Bollywood number!" and finally he said okay. It's a fast-moving number—and colorful. When I first saw my red costume for the song, I thought I was going to be driving with the Ferrari racing car team.

**You played all of these Oompas that were later digitalized into hundreds more.**

**How did it feel to see yourself multiplied?** I was shocked. When Tim and I first discussed the part in 2003, he told me, "I'd love for you to play five Oompas." But five Oompas quickly turned into 165—and they're not computerized; I did each one individually myself. For example, there are 21 Oompas in the foreground during the first song, and as I acted out each one, we'd bring in professional dancers [as stand-ins] because I couldn't do all 21 at the same time. Tim would come and watch the 20 dancers rehearse with me, and then I'd [switch and perform the other roles]. We did each num-



Highmore and Burton cruise the chocolate river; (inset) Oompa-Loompas entertain the guests

“A lot of people are huge fans of the [1971 film] and hold it in awe,” says Burton. “I wasn’t one of them.”



mean, I know that people do consider that film a classic. But the way people talk, it's like we're taking copies of the old movie and burning them so no one can ever see them again. People can go and make up their own minds."

### A happy ending?

**J**OHNNY DEPP'S TRAILER IS LIKE THE LOVE DEN OF A Middle Eastern pasha. Candelabra flicker in the dark, Oriental tapestries hang from the walls, and a bowl of grapes fit for a harem sits in the center of the coffee table. As Depp swigs from a thermos of coffee, he tries to explain his typically offbeat inspiration for playing the candyman. "The things that Tim and I talked about early on were small-time, local game-show hosts. The guy who at the age of 65 says, 'I was big in Tahoe once as Uncle Al or whatever.'"

Seemingly random tics and loco flourishes are nothing new for Depp when he collaborates with Burton. For *Ed Wood*, he modeled his performance on a ventriloquist's dummy—a ventriloquist's dummy that just happened to be wearing high heels and an angora sweater. And for *Sleepy Hollow*, Depp claims he played Ichabod Crane as a cross between Angela Lansbury and a 13-year-old girl. When Depp's asked why he hides his box office good looks behind strange wigs, fake teeth, and girly squeals, he rolls a cigarette and considers the question. "I think it's an actor's responsibility to change every time. Not only for himself and the people he's working with,

but for the audience. If you just go out and deliver the same dish every time...it's meatloaf again...you'd get bored. I'd get bored."

Boring is one thing Depp will never be accused of being. Defiant about courting success, sure. Pushing his characters as far as they can possibly bend, absolutely. Still, you have to wonder if one of these days Depp will bend one of his characters to the breaking point. That he'll wind up appealing to an audience of one: himself. If Depp were ever going to choose a moment to let his freakiest of freak flags fly, however, *Charlie* is probably the best chance he'll get. After all, *Pirates of the Caribbean*—during which Depp notoriously battled with nervous Disney execs over how far-out he was playing the sozzled, swashbuckling Captain Jack—became a sort of vindication for Depp's outré instincts, plundering more than \$300 million at the box office. "Success speaks volumes," says Burton. "For people in Hollywood, it means everything. But I'm sure the Warner Bros. executives were still lying awake at nights, sweating, thinking what the f— are they doing? And maybe appropriately so."

Depp says he never heard a word. Which made him even more anxious. "We had been shooting *Charlie* for about a month," he says, "and I was beginning to get nervous because there weren't any phone calls. I called my agent and asked, 'Has no one called from the studio to complain or say, 'Hey, what's he doing?' or 'Hey, he's freaking us out?' And when she said no, I thought, 'Christ, I'm not doing enough! Something's wrong!' Then some of the studio brass came over to the set, and they were sitting in my trailer and I was all decked out as Wonka with the little bangs. And I just had to know. So I said, 'Okay, who was the first one, when you started seeing the dailies, that got a little worried?' And there was this beautiful 30-second silence. And [Warner Bros. president] Alan Horn finally said, 'Yeah, that was me.' I felt better instantly." ■